

# Readings

### Additional readings

The following list is provided as options for:

- facilitator pre-reading, if desired
- participant reading during *Short Trails*
- a place where participants can be directed for those who wish to engage with more material following the workshop

Brady, S. (2009). Lauren and Niki. *The Lutheran*, April 2009 Vol 43 No 3, 25-27

Butler, R. (2002). Why is teaching today so tough? *SchoolLink*, May 2001 Vol 8 No 1, 4-5.

Habel, N. (2005). Challenge Five With a Heart, *Six Challenges Six Mysteries* (pp. 40-43). Adelaide: LEA.

Jericho, A. (2005). I broke one of my rules ... and we spoke about community. *SchoolLink* July 2005 Vol 12 No 2, 3.

Kahl, B. (2001). How many people do you really know? *SchoolLink* August 2001 Vol 7 No 2, 1-2.

Kotzur, J (2009). The other 3 R's. *The Lutheran*, April 2009 Vol 43 No 3, 28-29.

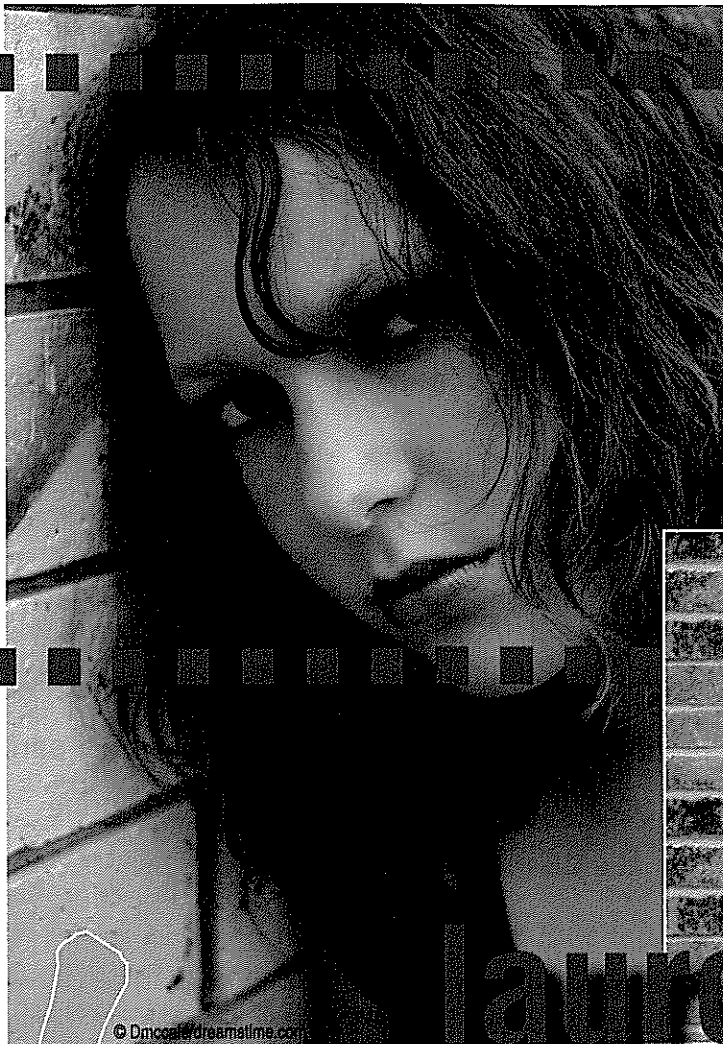
LEA (2005). *A vision for learners and learning in Lutheran schools*. Adelaide: LEA. (pp. 3, 7, 11 14-15)

LEA (2005). Key idea 1 Christians believe that God creates people to live in relationship with him and with each other, *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework Theological Notes* (pp. 38-41). Adelaide: LEA.

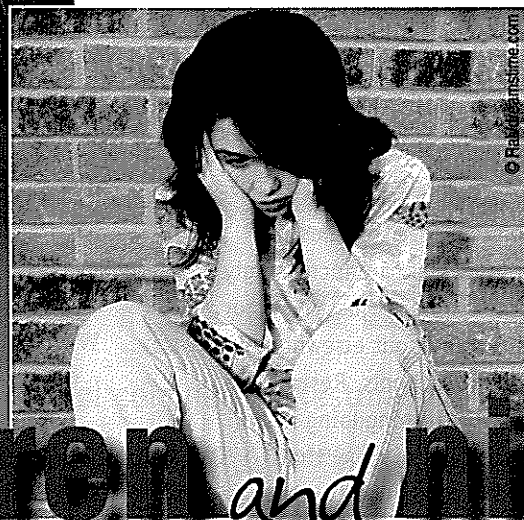
LEA (2005). Key idea 2 Christians are called to love and serve all people, *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework Theological Notes* (pp. 42-45). Adelaide: LEA.

LEA (2005). Key idea 3 Christians have a responsibility in and for the world, *Christian Studies Curriculum Framework Theological Notes* (pp. 46-48). Adelaide: LEA.

Schmidt, M. (2005). We have souls: Service learning at the Hong Kong International School. *SchoolLink* April 2005 Vol 11 No 1, 1-2.



When a schoolgirl misunderstanding escalated into abuse, a Lutheran college used restorative practices to make things right



## lauren and niki

by Steve Brady

**The mother's voice sounded tentative and laced with fear: 'I'm not sure we should do this. I don't want things to get worse.'**

I certainly didn't want things to get worse either. As the counsellor at St Andrews Lutheran College, a P-12 college on the Gold Coast, I had listened to her daughter Lauren\*, a Year 9 student, tearfully and fearfully tell me a disturbing story of harassment and vilification by a fellow student. Most of the abuse took place during exchanges on MSN, an instant internet messaging network, which is hugely popular with students.

Over and over, what started out as friendly and inviting conversations would erupt in foul tirades. Lauren would cry as she struggled to understand why her friend Niki\* had turned

on her so viciously.

In many ways it was a foul story that unfortunately typifies the challenges school staff face in our ubiquitously wired yet increasingly disconnected world. It was to become, however, one of the most profoundly sacred stories in my nearly ten years at the college.

Lauren's mother was worried that the intervention we were planning to support her daughter and deal with Niki's offending behaviours would lead to retribution by Niki and her friends, and even more suffering for Lauren.

But we had to do something. The abuse had been going on unreported for eight months. Enough was enough!

The story presented a classic challenge. At one level it was clear that the offending behaviours had to be dealt with. But on another level,

underneath the vitriol was a broken relationship, which could not be healed by the traditional disciplinary method of inflicting punishment.

At St Andrews we have been exploring this challenge for years. Like many schools we have used traditional models of discipline:

- what has happened?
- what rule was broken?
- who's to blame?
- what punishment is deserved?
- lecture, threat, warning, detention, removal from class, daily report, move seat, time out, suspension, expulsion.

Traditional models of discipline can certainly stop offending behaviour. But while they can control it, they miss the mark<sup>60</sup> — especially if good behaviour is maintained only while the teacher

is looking! Imposing punishment rarely addresses effectively either the cause of the offence or the harm done. It can damage relationships and lead to resentment, revenge or rebellion. The approach assumes that pain is somehow healed by inflicting even more pain, and it can put school staff in the role of adversary with students. The inflicting of punishment does not teach the lessons or develop the skills required to heal and restore broken relationships.

When we heard about the emerging social science known as Restorative Practices, many of us at our school recognised that its philosophy and processes reflected the culture that we had been building for years but still needed to refine. Its core philosophy for relating to justice and the righting of wrongs, as well as its language and processes, are increasingly being used in the criminal justice sector (which you can read about elsewhere in this edition) and in schools. Restorative Practices approaches wrongdoing and interpersonal conflict in a way that incorporates both accountability and support for those involved. This fresh way of looking at justice makes it clear that 'fight or flight' are not the only ways to respond to conflict. There is a third way — transformation.

The key principles of Restorative Practices are:

- All crime and misconduct is a fundamental violation of people and interpersonal relationships. So, too, are 'toxic' and unresolved interpersonal conflicts.
- These violations create obligations and liabilities.
- Restorative Practices seeks to heal and put things right.

So, justice is not just about rules; it's about relationships and working with people to put things right. At the heart of Restorative Practices is a commitment to profound fairness and to building a culture of listening that brings about interpersonal connection and healing.

For us as a school community



Restorative Practices provides a place for true accountability and an opportunity for the offender to be part of the solution rather than merely part of the problem in relationships that have gone wrong. It's definitely not a soft option

Restorative Practices has become a way of responding to wrongdoing and protracted conflict that avoids reverting to the 'discipline that divides'. Restorative Practices provides a path for us as Christian educators to discipline in a way that lives out not only the law but also the gospel.

The processes of Restorative Practices create a safe space for respectful dialogue and restorative enquiry. This can involve getting all the key stakeholders into a circle with a trained facilitator. Key questions and variants seek to build understanding — and they can provide amazing insights.

The core questions are:

- What has happened?
- What were you thinking?
- Who has been affected by what has happened, and in what way?
- What needs to be done to put things right?

We have found again and again that the circles become places of peacemaking when they are facilitated sensitively and compassionately and

when all participants 'let go and have a go'. We see young people learning how to turn conflict into cooperation.

Restorative Practices provides a voice for those who have been wronged and provides a place for the discovery of personal courage. Nevertheless, Lauren went into the meeting understandably nervous about having to face Niki.

Niki was also nervous about the meeting, but as I talked with her, she saw the sense of putting things right with Lauren because 'after all, we used to be friends'. Restorative Practices provides a place for true accountability and an opportunity for the offender to be part of the solution rather than merely part of the problem in relationships that have gone wrong. It's definitely not a soft option.

Things started to go badly, however, as soon as the meeting began. Niki became unsettled. With her eyes cast down, she fidgeted nervously. We began to explore the first question: What has happened? This is an opportunity for wrongdoing to be acknowledged,

and it sets the foundation for what is to follow. But Niki turned to me and blurted out, 'This is stupid! It's not going to work!'

It looked as though our discussion was going to fail even before it had begun. But as I look back on this meeting, I realise that it was here that the 'sacredness' began, even though it didn't feel like it at the time. The power of conflict very often lies in emotions expressed in destructive ways. The power of Restorative Practices is that it makes space for this and provides a path for these emotions to be acknowledged and expressed in safe ways.

I acknowledged what Niki said. Although it sounded like defiance, in reality she was afraid of facing Lauren and the other girls. I reassured her and reminded her of her willingness to be involved prior to the meeting. We came to a mutual decision to continue.

There were many tears as Lauren and her friends shared one by one the distress and hurt they felt about what had been happening. I found the level of emotion in this meeting very moving. In fact, I had trouble holding my own tears back! Niki cried as well.

As we moved through the questions to what needed to be done to put things right, something profound happened. It was a sign that there was going to be healing in this circle.

'Niki, I'm sorry we misunderstood you. I'm sorry you were hurt by that.' It was Kimberley\*, one of Lauren's friends, making this apology. At this point in Restorative Practices meetings it is very often the wrongdoer who apologises. However, in this case it was one of those who had been hurt who made the first step towards restoration.

Niki sat with her head bowed. Only a quick glance up at Kimberley signalled that she acknowledged what had been said. But it spoke volumes.

'I'm sorry for the mean things I've said and done', Niki said, still without lifting her head.

What followed was a sacred time. Apology after apology flowed among the girls. Through it all Niki kept her head

bowed, only to give a quick glance to each girl with whom she was restoring peace. The intense tears that had flowed earlier now ushered in quiet 'sorrys' with profound depth. I will never forget sitting listening to the girls during this time. The silent pauses between each 'sorry' added to a sense of peace that settled on the group.

We moved on to a time in which the girls formed an agreement among themselves to chart a way forward. In follow-up meetings I was pleased to see that restoration had been achieved in this case. Though the friendship never returned to the depth of earlier years, Lauren and Niki are friends again, and not once has Niki shown any of the acrimonious and abusive behaviour she did during those difficult months.

One of the fathers of Restorative Practices, Howard Zehr, writes in his

of Restorative Practices resonates with the heart and soul of the gospel — God reconciling men, women and children to himself through Jesus Christ (2 Cor 5:18). Easter is a call to remember God's eternal conversation with us, through confronting the pain and separation of sin, through the crucifixion of Jesus and his resurrection. Psalm 85:10 has also been on my mind as I have been writing this article. It reminds me of a 'theology of meeting', where 'righteousness and peace kiss each other'.

As I reflect on the many restorative conversations in which I have been involved, I recall seeing righteousness and peace 'kiss', as painful injustices and a hunger for peace are shown a way to put things right. As Restorative Practices gains momentum in Lutheran schools in Australia, I hope and pray that God's ministry of reconciliation

For us as a school community Restorative Practices has become a way of responding to wrongdoing and protracted conflict that avoids reverting to the 'discipline that divides'. Restorative Practices provides a path for us as Christian educators to discipline in a way that lives out not only the law but also the gospel

book, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, 'True justice emerges from conversation ...' The story of Niki, Lauren and their friends is the story of a sacred conversation that desperately needed to happen. In schools, churches and communities everywhere we see injustice and pseudo-justice enacted because people don't have the conversations they need to.

As I write this we are approaching Easter, the time when we celebrate the greatest story of restoration ever told. I believe that the heart and soul

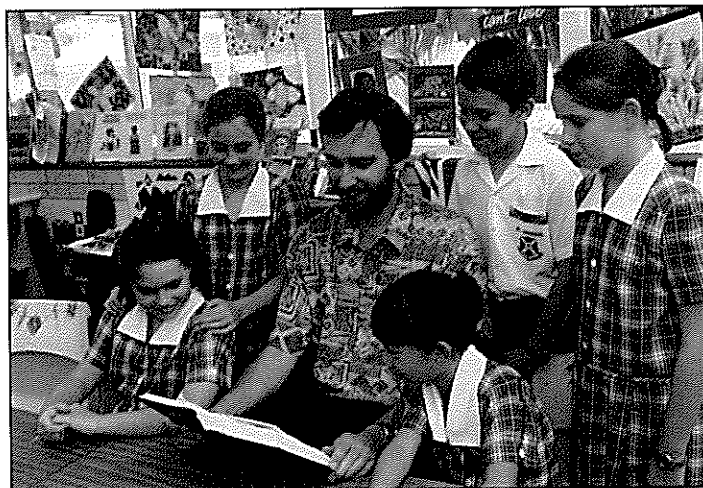
will be extended through many, many conversations like that sacred one with Lauren and Niki.

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\* Names and details have been changed for purposes of confidentiality.

# Why is teaching today so tough?

*Spiritually evolved people, by virtue of their discipline, mastery and love, are people of extraordinary competence, and in their competence they are called on to serve the world, and in their love they answer the call. They are inevitably, therefore, people of great power, although the world may generally behold them as quite ordinary people, since more often than not they will exercise their power in quiet or even hidden ways. Nonetheless, exercise power they do, and in this exercise they suffer greatly, even dreadfully. For to exercise power is to make decisions, and the process of making decisions with total awareness is often infinitely more painful than making decisions with limited or blunted awareness.* M Scott Peck, *The Road Less Travelled*, London, 1978, p 75



Ed Szabo with St Andrews students

Almost everyone will tell you (except when they are complaining about teachers having too many holidays) that teaching is a tough job. 'I wouldn't want to do it' they say with a grimace. Teachers who have been teaching for years tell you it's tougher now than it ever was, and various reasons are given – the children are more badly behaved, the courses keep changing, the pay is lousy, the status has declined to that of a used car salesman, etc, etc.

But recently M Scott Peck's famous book suggested to me another reason.

Many teachers, I submit, are 'spiritually-evolved people' who are extraordinarily competent, loving and sensitive. Because they are invested with power they are constantly called upon to make complex and difficult decisions which lead to personal suffering. This is why teaching is tough – and also why it is so rewarding.

## Love

*In the end... only kindness matters*

Jewel

There is one quality of the modern teacher that is essential, above all others – the ability to give and show love. In the past teachers could get by, and were often respected, if they were tough, distant and unyielding. Maybe these teachers still loved their students – but they sure didn't show it. 'Don't smile until Easter', beginning teachers

were advised by experienced ones. While this saying has some practical use, it reflects an underlying belief, now discredited, that developing open and loving relationships with students will necessarily undermine order and the educational process. In fact, the reverse is true – many students will simply not learn if they think the teacher does not like them. In secondary schools, for example, students will not select a subject, even if it is essential for their future, if they think the teacher is demeaning or unapproachable. Parents, I have found, are much more

likely to complain today if they think a teacher is uncaring, than if she has poor class control or doesn't know her subject. Maybe teachers are being asked to fill the love-void left when parents are absent because of family separation or work commitments. Maybe children, reared more gently and flexibly than those of previous generations, only recognise love in a quiet voice and a compassionate demeanour.

Whatever the reason, teachers are responding to students' need for love by giving love in return. They are listening more and speaking less; they are reflecting more and confronting less; they are offering choices more and directing less. By opening themselves up to love, though, teachers are opening themselves to the possibility of pain. Teachers who become more aware of needs often act self-sacrificially to meet them. They spend more time, struggle to learn more sophisticated skills and use more energy solving problems. Indeed, Christian teachers find themselves modelling the servant leadership of Jesus who gave himself up in humble service to those he loved.

## Power

*Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.* Nelson Mandela

It is just as well most teachers are capable of love, because they have immense power. And the more teachers relate to students one-to-one, the more personal power they have. Parents delegate to teachers their responsibility to nurture their precious children for thirteen impressionable years for six or more hours of each day. One sentence from a teacher, can have a lifelong effect: 'You think you're special, but you're not' said to one of my children; 'You're basically a good kid – I think you'll be OK' said to another. One action by a teacher can change a life: a too-hard Maths paper that permanently affected a child's confidence; a teacher's home offered to a child during a traumatic time that



St Andrews Lutheran College students

brought about a family reconciliation. When teachers engage with students at a profound level, they begin to realise the extraordinary power they have to inflict damage or to promote good. Such a realisation can bring both anxiety and delight.

Teacher power has also increased in another way in recent years. At every level educational leaders are abandoning top-down hierarchical structures and employing collaborative processes to give stakeholders a voice in decision-making. Leaders are seen as those who influence the values of an organisation, not just those who occupy designated positions. Teacher-leaders spend hours of time working in teams to make policy and determine procedures in many aspects of school life.

## Suffering

*'His glorious power will make you patient and strong enough to endure anything, and you will be truly happy.'*

Col 1:11

Thus teachers are now expected to make many more decisions than they ever have before and the decisions themselves are much more difficult. In today's world, moral, spiritual and educational direction is much less clear. Postmodern people generally reject the idea of absolute truth and authority and insist upon individual freedom and





*Sal Mattner with St Andrews student*



*Ruth Butler with St Andrews students*

respect for 'difference'. There is so much choice on offer, and we are told that in our world change is the only constant. Many thoughtful Christians recognise that we need to accept some of the challenges posed to our life and faith by today's thinkers and policy makers (for example the commitment to social justice) but we cannot swallow everything whole.

For example, Christians stake our faith on the notion that there *is* such a thing as truth and it is found in the person and work of Jesus Christ. We affirm the reliability of a text, the Bible, to teach us clear guidelines for our lives. Yet society as a whole has no more respect for Christ or the Bible than it has for any religious text. 'Because the Bible tells you so' as a reason for obeying a rule carries absolutely no weight at all with most teenagers today. The only absolute truth, it seems, is that there is no absolute truth.

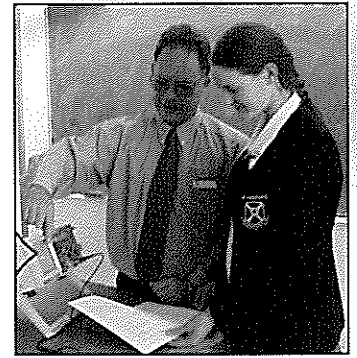
Decision-making for today's Christian teachers and administrators becomes very difficult when we must consider both biblical guidelines and the legitimate postmodern insistence upon social justice and equity. For example, what should we do about the homosexual student who 'comes out' to his peers, or the teacher having an extra-marital affair, or the student who is planning an abortion? Teachers make decisions about such situations, sometimes with considerable anguish, knowing that, whatever they do, they will incur the disapproval or wrath of some of the people concerned, their Christian friends and leaders, or society at large.

Perhaps the major source of stress in decision-making for teachers and administrators today is the tension between the postmodern concern about the rights and freedoms of the individual, and the traditional respect for order, authority and the value of

community. While there is a strong rhetoric in political and educational circles about the need for community, when the chips are down most students (and parents) today want their individual needs put first. St Paul's instruction, 'Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others' is dismissed as impossibly foolhardy, along with 'Turn the other cheek'. In the past in schools it was not so difficult to solve situations involving conflict between the interests of an individual and the interests of the group. If in doubt, the needs of the whole won over the needs of the one. If a child did badly on a test because of a personal problem - 'Tough!' If he disrupted a class - 'Outside!' If a child was disabled - 'Hard luck, off to special school!'

Today if the teacher clearly knows her students and is sensitive to their needs, it is a much tougher call. As Scott Peck says, 'the process of making decisions with total awareness is often infinitely more painful than making decisions with limited or blunted awareness (which is the way most decisions are made and why they are ultimately proved wrong)' P76. Consider the pain of the teacher who has to decide to leave out of the sporting team the student with low self-esteem who would most benefit personally from inclusion, or the Special Needs teacher who supports inclusive education for a disabled student despite the opposition of parents of other students in the class, or the Deputy who chooses not to suspend a student for fighting because he knows how the boy's abusive father will respond or the Principal who expels a normally well-behaved student for dealing in drugs.

It would not be surprising if we found today's teachers trying to back away



*John Burnett with St Andrews student*

from such powerful decision-making responsibility. But instead, they continue, day after day, to take up the challenge out of love for those whom they serve. Yes, they may suffer, but they can take heart in the knowledge that their decisions are more likely to have positive results than those made with less personal cost. According to Scott Peck 'The best decision-makers are those who are willing to suffer the most over their decisions but still retain their ability to be decisive. One measure - and perhaps the best measure of a person's greatness is the capacity for suffering. Yet the great are also joyful.' Those who experience pain through the service of others, then, can also expect joy. Joy because Christ comforts them with his Spirit, joy because they are working harmoniously with others, joy because they see their work bearing good fruit, and joy because once in a while, not too often, and usually many years later, somebody, somewhere says 'thank you - you made a difference.'

**Ruth Butler**  
Principal  
St Andrews Lutheran College  
Burleigh Qld



*Stephen McGrath with St Andrews students*

# *I broke one of my rules ... and we spoke about community*

A basic rule in my office is that I do not speak to any parent of a Lutheran school who has a grievance against their school. I point out that all operational matters in Lutheran education are handled locally and that my office deals with policy issues and national relations. Parents are referred back to the school to seek resolution, and if that does not work, then to the district director. If the issue has arisen after the latter has happened, then I will satisfy myself that due process has occurred. I will then add the aggrieved and their school to my prayer list.

Today I spoke to a parent – Judy (not her real name) an interstate parent who was so moved by her experience of community at the Lutheran school her children attend that she wanted to tell 'someone higher up' about it. Her husband had died at 32 and she was left with three young children. She spoke of the caring school community that had supported her and her children. The unobtrusive additional attention that she felt that her children had received from teachers, the three months of meals she did not have to cook, and seemingly always having someone to talk to. A real sense of belonging to a caring community dominated her perception of that school.

In the last edition of *SchoolLink* I wrote about service being an authentic quality of the Lutheran school. In this article I want to suggest that a second quality is community. Community implies relationships and people, and in all that it does the Lutheran school will focus on people. It is people rather than tradition or the old school tie or projecting a marketable image that matter in the end.

Our theological tradition asserts that we are called to serve and are to be 'faith active in love'. Our understanding of vocation encourages us to see our life as one that is lived in relationships. Attending divine service on Sunday is preparation for a life of service in the various stations of life – family, community, work and church. From the beginning God created humans to live in relationships and not to be alone – the call to be human has a clear sense of connectedness. Our heritage points us to the theology of the cross where we see the love of God for the world, Christ working in the world and Christ present when we see those who suffer. And so we, as connected people, identify with the marginalised, are challenged to side with the hurting and 'do it unto the least of these'.

Community in the Lutheran school sense is not 'rah rah' stuff, but rather people of God in action. It is not really the positive vibes and feelings of wellbeing that we gain from being part of a successful community that matter. Community is rather what we do in compassion and pastoral care. Actions in love are the clearest manifestations of school as community. Whilst being a Christian caring community just rolls off the tongue of Lutheran school leaders, for Judy and countless others like her it is experienced reality.

In community we acknowledge and celebrate the gifts of individuals. There is a realisation that all are gifted in different ways. However, these gifts are not given for the good name of the school, nor for self-advancement, but for a life of service. Community moderates a natural tendency to use gifts selfishly.

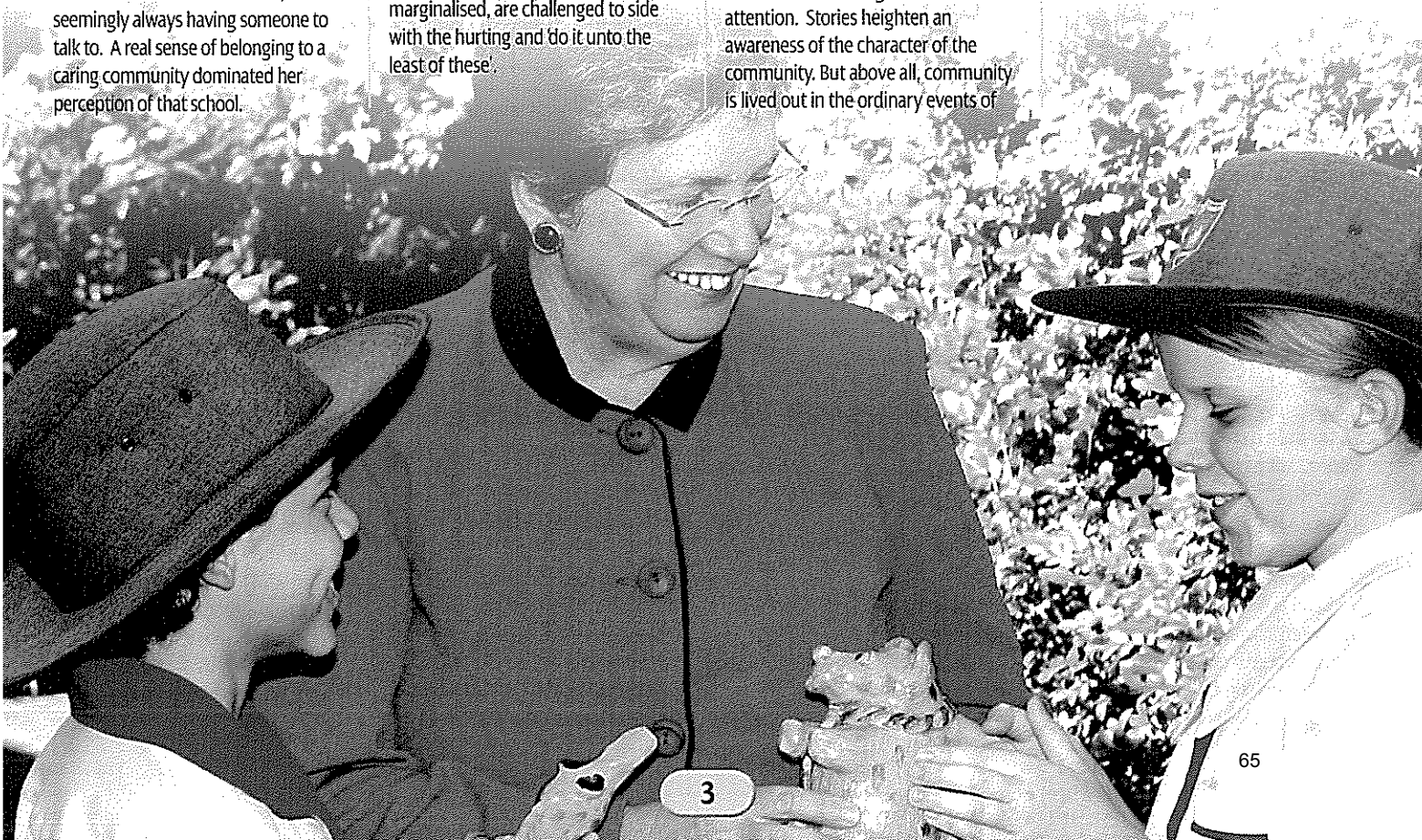
Worship and devotionals, at both staff and whole of school levels are at the heart of community building in the Lutheran school, providing the motivation and rationale. There are symbols such as mottos, mission statements and badges that focus attention. Stories heighten an awareness of the character of the community. But above all, community is lived out in the ordinary events of

school life. The Lutheran school's connection to its congregation(s) strengthens and enriches the sense of community.

Of course I know all about the Lutheran school as community since I worked and lived in three Lutheran school communities for 25 years. Now I exist outside of a Lutheran school community and I miss it. It is thus a reality for me, as it is for Judy and her three young children.

It was not only my rule about seeing parents that made me anxious about seeing Judy. My busy program keeps me focused on time schedules and a thirty minute fit in appointment would stand in stark contrast to the patient and ongoing care that she had experienced in her Lutheran school community. In highlighting community as a quality of the Lutheran school I acknowledge with thanks the teachers, principals and others who in countless and mundane ways daily build community.

**Adrienne Jericho**  
Executive Director  
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# SCHOOL / LINK

Lutheran Church of Australia

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## How many people do you *really* know?

**H**ow many people do you know in a tangible way? How many people could you not only readily put a name to but also add a comment, such as 'You're a Tigers supporter!', and they could reciprocate? Needless to say, there would be many.

To go a little further, consider how many people you *really* know, which goes beyond being aware that the person concerned supports the Tigers to why he or she does so. Some describe this *really* knowing as grasping the intangible and when it can be reciprocated the number of people in the circle shrinks considerably. However, for professionals such as teachers, school staff and pastors, who work directly with people, the circle of those who *really* know each other can become extensive.

### Knowing each other

Educators, and surely all who work in Lutheran schools, are concerned with really knowing their students. This kind of knowing goes beyond the *what* and the *how* of the student to the *why*. It is a knowing that probes beneath the surface and unravels the layers that lie behind a student's responses and actions. Really knowing a student is also a sensitive knowing that does not demand entry into a student's life, nor infiltrates or invades the private world of the student. Instead, the educator stands ready, welcoming the student into his or her own world, while waiting

to be invited into the life of the student, so that each can *really* know the other. It is reciprocal. It is a giving of each other that shares, confides and informs in a relationship of trust. If Lutheran schools are true to their desire to be concerned with the development of the whole person, educators within them can have no lesser aim.

The demands upon schools today make the development of this kind of teacher-student relationship difficult.

Accountability, expectations, results, awards, public relations are all terms, each with their own particular requirements, with which schools are faced continually. In the end, the major purveyor that measures these outcomes is the student. Thus it is very easy to see students as 'producers'. As producers students are known for the results they do or do not achieve, the correct or incorrect way they wear the uniform, the number of times they behave appropriately or inappropriately, their success or lack of it on the sporting field, their participation in school life or absence from it, and so on, all the time accompanied by laudatory or incriminating record keeping.

Contrasting to a view of students as 'producers' is seeing them as 'persons' and here comes another great problem for teachers. How do teachers find out who their students really are so they can *really* know them? Surely it is essential to be aware of the student's world outside the school.



### The importance of families

Students come to schools loaded with information and opinions gained elsewhere and research shows that, irrespective of its state, the family is a most significant factor in determining the meaning that a student makes of life. The impact of family values has a profound effect upon schools and educators. If the aim of a school is to *really* know its students, then it needs to understand their families. One school saw this as so important as to have as its motto, 'No enrolment of a student without the enrolment of the family'.



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When a school develops such an approach its duty of care statistics explode and the task of the school becomes enormous. No matter what level of schooling is offered a commitment to both the family and the student begins already at the enrolment interview. It is conducted in such a way that the principal has a responsibility to the family clearly in mind and by the time the student commences at the school the new family is as embedded in the school as its child. When the teacher teaches, that educator is mindful of the student's family and as the pastor attends to the spiritual needs of the student, it is not done in isolation from the spiritual life of the family to which the student belongs. A school that has a commitment to *really know* its students as persons, cannot hope to achieve that objective unless staff members *really know* those students in relation to their families. Ambitious standards like this may be difficult to meet in schools that do not find themselves nestled in small, well defined communities, but such an approach is just as important in larger, more complex school communities, and probably more so.

The concern for the individual student as a person is necessary for that person to be fully developed in all aspects of life. Permeating all of life for a Christian is a relationship with Jesus Christ and Lutheran schools desire this relationship for their students, families and personnel. Faith can not be forced, but an environment is provided for it to be expressed, nurtured, questioned and developed. This requires an open relationship where people are respected and feel free to share of themselves; where people are encouraged to be themselves, the real people that we all want to be able to understand. Such freedom, such trust, and such respect build true community.

All members of that community have strengths and weaknesses. In an educational outcome driven learning environment schools go to considerable lengths to identify these differences. Strengths are directed and weaknesses

identified, with some students being regarded as being at risk in various areas. Seeing students not only as producers, but also as persons goes beyond the purely academic domain. Out of concern for the student as a spiritual being schools are well aware of those students and their families that are at risk spiritually. Of particular focus are students and families who are not under the umbrella of a spiritual home, be it Lutheran or other. These are the members of the school community who do not, as yet, see the need for spiritual support, or who would not have a natural haven if they needed such assistance. For these students and families the school either is or stands ready to be their church and, indeed, there may be a good deal of standing ready to be. During this time, however, the school personnel will do all they can so they and 'at risk' families *really know* each other and mutual understandings allow a family to seek out members of the school community for support if and when the family crunch time comes. And there is little doubt that it will come, at least once in every five or six years according to research.

#### The importance of staff

A Lutheran school has often been described as an enlarged family or a mutually associated community, comprising other linked, smaller communities. When it comes to encouraging a sense of community within the school and the sectors within it, however, there is one group within the enlarged family that is pivotal in developing the sense of *really knowing*, appreciating and accepting each other. That cohort is the staff.

If there is a desire to engender what has been described as community in the large family of the school amongst school families, the modelling of a sense of community by the staff is essential. There are many things, however, that mitigate against the staff as community and serve to keep staff members apart. The size of the school can dissipate a feeling of community amongst the staff, classroom walls keep teachers apart, administration may appear to close doors

against the staff and vice-versa, the busyness of schools and business filled staff agendas prevent personal sharing, departments cause divisions, and the list goes on.

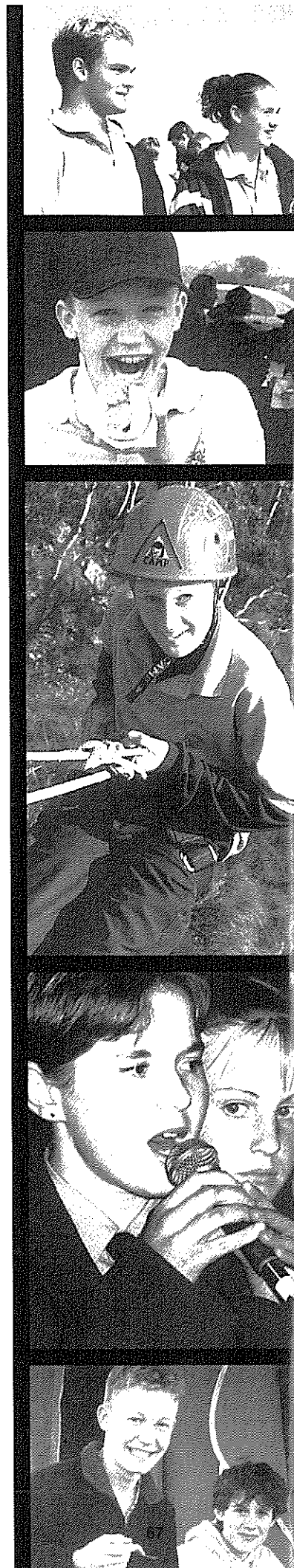
Unfortunately a school will not have a sense of community if the staff does not have the opportunity, desire or encouragement to be a community itself. A school can never be something that its staff is not, therefore the efforts to provide opportunities for staff to *really know* each other must be relentless. Surely it begins with time put aside for staff to gather around the Word of God. Here staff members can struggle with what a personal relationship with Jesus Christ means and explore the impact that understanding has on their relationships with each other. Some schools use retreats for this purpose, while others use times of study. Then there are the times of just being together and learning what makes each other tick, having the time to become aware of the joys and hurts in each other's lives. Where all staff members have a desire to build community, there is an example of what it means to *really know* each other for families to follow.

#### Blessed schools

Twenty years ago Emeritus Professor, W G Walker, addressing a national conference on school governance, said 'we can indubitably identify the schools as the churches of the late twentieth century' and there is little doubt that this is true in many ways of Lutheran schools in the early twenty-first century. Walker went on to describe these 'surrogate churches' also as 'surrogate homes' which led him to sigh 'Poor teachers, poor schools, poor curriculum, poor administrators, poor God'.

However, we shout, not poor, but blessed. Blessed teachers, blessed schools, blessed curriculum, and blessed administrators. Thank you God for the opportunity for us to be instruments of your message of healing, reconciliation and grace to our students and their families.

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# SCHOOLink

Lutheran EDUCATION Australia

## We Have Souls: Service Learning at the Hong Kong International School

### The search for soulfulness

One comment has resonated within me in recent months as I continue to explore and marvel at how and why service activities here at the Hong Kong International School (HKIS) regularly produce life-altering revelations within our students. Following last November's Humanities class trip to an orphanage in southern China, our class was discussing what we had really accomplished in a mere three days of visits. Why, I pushed further, do we not simply give up when we are barraged with the over-whelming needs all around us – when we watch the news, when we pick up a newspaper ... or when we visit a country with an endless number of healthy baby girls abandoned simply because of their gender? I repeated: Why don't we give up? Silence ... a long pause. Then from the right hand corner of the room, Grace broke the silence with a voice of conviction, almost exasperation, *WE HAVE SOULS*. Although the power of the remark did not immediately dawn on me, in the weeks and months since I have often returned to her comment, for it spoke powerfully about not only the answer to my specific question, but to bigger questions I've often pondered: How can I make education a



Humanities students at Fo shan Orphanage.

soulful experience? How can my teaching soul meet the souls of my students?

I've surrendered to the belief that for most students in my classroom I can't; or, more positively, I can do it so much more effectively and almost easily with out-of-the-classroom service experiences. Service brings to the surface that which lies within: our very souls. Let me, then, share with you our school's journey over the last fifteen years.

### Growth in HKIS service experiences in the 1990s

Within my first month at HKIS in 1990, a veteran teacher asked me to co-lead

an 'interim' trip – our annual overseas field trips in March – with twenty students to an orphanage in Pattaya, Thailand. I found the experience in Thailand that year and in subsequent March trips extraordinary – I sensed a power at work within our students at the orphanage that I had not sensed before. Determining to find something closer to home, in March 1995, I led my first trip to an orphanage in the southern Chinese city of Foshan. Once again, I noticed the same effect: whether students were life-long residents of Hong Kong or newcomers, Asian or Western, male or female, freshmen or seniors, spending time with orphans for a week was a

transformative event. As a teacher, I yearned to find that 'elixir' – that transformative power that I could pass onto students in my classroom. What I worked so hard to achieve and only very occasionally saw evidence of in the classroom seemed to come to fruition predictably and rather effortlessly in a few days of holding an orphan in China.

While my orphanage work was starting to take shape in China, service at HKIS

We have souls.....	1
Service:	
A mark of the authentic Lutheran school.....	3
Shaken .....	4
ALWS - Learning service.....	6
Service:	
Valid faith journeys .....	8
District news.....	10
Faith story	

THEME FOR  
THIS ISSUE:

Service  
Learning



was also taking a positive turn in 1996. My principal, Jim Handrich, called my wife, Zella, and me into his office one day and suggested that we start an ongoing service program on Saturdays. We reflexively defended our 'Day of Giving' program, a one-day event in which all students went out into the community to participate in some type of service. But the more Jim talked, the more we knew he was right – ongoing programs could be far more meaningful for our students and far more beneficial to our community partners than a one-off event. Thus, Service on Saturday (SOS) was born in 1996 with six programs.

## Re-reading the gospels

An essential personal perspective was that I was teaching Biblical Studies day-in and day-out. I daily struggled with the gospels to understand Jesus better and to make his ideas relevant. Now in Asia and working with orphans, teaching about social inequalities, and being confronted with the brokenness of society, I began to explore the human, socially active Jesus. His radical vision of the Kingdom of God announced a new type of spiritual community that would 'preach good news to the poor ... release to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed ...' (Luke 4:18-19).

It is no exaggeration to say that my fire and energy for service grew apace with my understanding of Jesus' own fire and energy for the Kingdom of God, which included care for widows, orphans, the stranger, the poor. When I re-read Jesus' words in Matthew 25, 'If you have done it to the least of my brothers, you have done it unto me,' I better understood service as worship. Doing service, the passage suggested, was not simply imitating Jesus, but even experiencing Jesus, the centre of my faith life. These spiritual insights meant that through service I wasn't simply doing good for others; I was following Christ, worshipping Christ, pursuing the mystery of God in Christ through service.

## From community service to service learning

By this point in 1997 our school had developed significant service programs: SOS was growing and the number of service-related interims had grown from one in 1991 to eight in 1997. But after a trip to Ateneo, a

Catholic school in the Philippines, I realised that all our programs were *extracurricular*. They were what we call '**community service**' programs. However, what Ateneo introduced to me was a far better way – the integration of service into the formal classroom setting. This intentional attempt for students to study (in the classroom), experience (out of the classroom), and reflect on both ways of knowing is true '**service learning**.'

This insight has led to the introduction of three service learning courses over the last seven years: A senior elective, 'Service, Society, and the Sacred'; a Biblical Studies course, 'Word and World'; and a core double period ninth grade course, 'Humanities I in Action.' In this class students wrestle during the week with the causes of and solutions to injustice, while on Saturdays students teach English at a nearby Hong Kong primary school. The highlight of the year, of course, is the weekend visit to the Foshan orphanage.

The chart below summarises the three stages that have occurred at HKIS in our service programs over the last fifteen years.

While going from step 1 to step 2 increased exposure, frequency, and quality, it wasn't until step 3 that classroom learning was intentionally tied to the service experiences.

## Student voices

In the end, the most important measure of success comes from what we see happen in the lives of our students. Here are some comments from our students.

*'Service scars you in the most beautiful way possible.'*

Bethany, after visiting the Foshan orphanage

*'Service is keeping humanity alive through beauty, love, and tolerance.'*

Ji E, freshman girl defining service in the Humanities I in Action course

*'Service is the art of healing the world and, in healing the world, so too do I heal myself.'*

Frequency of service	Role in school program	Examples
1. 1990 – 1997 Short term; episodic	Extracurricular	Day of Giving; a few interims; clubs and fundraising
2. 1997 – 2000 Long term; ongoing	Extracurricular	SOS program; more interims; clubs and fundraising
3. 2000 – Present Long term; ongoing	Curricular and Extracurricular	Service Learning courses in addition to other community service programs



Grace Chang holding a child.



A Mandarin-speaking HKIS student chatting with two streetsleepers.

Yang Ming, senior boy after visiting the Foshan orphanage

For some students, service forces them to re-consider their deepest spiritual assumptions:

*'The first time that I realised I truly believed in God was in the Philippines, participating in my very first Habitat for Humanity workcamp ... My soul has been hungry for the last 18 years and by God I'm feeding it.'*

Lisa, a senior who started our first Habitat for Humanities chapter

*'Something inside of me that had always been in a state of flux is now at rest.'*

Yvonne, summarising how her baptism at university brought her peace, a journey that was initiated through service.

## Conclusion

Our students yearn for a soulful educational experience – holistic learning opportunities that balance serious study with meaningful service experiences. For us as Christian teachers, such an integral vision of society is deeply rooted in our tradition. When Jesus was asked which of the 613 Torah laws was the most important, he answered with a comprehensive and multi-faceted vision: 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind ...' But the grand vision had a down-to-earth 'service' application: 'And a second one is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself' (Matthew 22:37,39). This, then, is our calling as Christian teachers. We must look deep within our individual and institutional souls and search out pervasively meaningful and spiritually engaging learning experiences. Our students' souls are very large, if only we can find authentic experiences to match.

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